

THE COMMUTER JOURNAL





Amelie Bonnet Villalonga

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Every day thousands of people around the world jump on their trusty steeds and pedal around the cities they call home. Whether they're artists, architects, tattooists, designers or activists, this rolling army are united by their love of the commute. For many of them, cycling is not just a means to an end, it's a way of life, and they are passionate about supporting its every evolution. The Commuter Journal is a celebration of these cyclists and the culture they have nurtured from the streets up.

We hope you enjoy it.

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Bicycle Diaries in Oz

Treadlie, Melbourne

Text: Faith Hunter
Illustration: Oliver Stafford

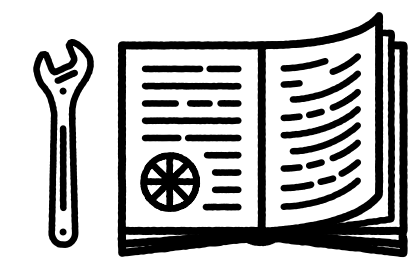
Treadlie is an Australian magazine founded by cycling enthusiast Tamsin O'Neill in December, 2010. With a mission statement to allow a wider audience to discover and enjoy bikes, current editor Faith Hunter focuses on the culture around cycling to reflect the growth of interest in Melbourne and beyond: "Whether it's cargo bike families, die-hard fixed-gear riders, tweed picnics, alley-cats, all-girl rides, fashionistas on bikes, roadies, penny-farthing riders, frame

builders or mud-lovers, suddenly everyone has found their niche on wheels!"

The following five things, says Faith Hunter, are where cycling in Australia is at right now.

Grassroots events are growing
"Australia has seen dozens of grassroots events pop up, organized by passionate people who are not content to sit back and wait for someone to do it for them. Many of these have become regular annual events attracting thousands of riders. Melburn Roobaix organised by bike brand FYXO, for example, is celebrating its tenth year in 2015 and has gone from attracting sixty fixed-gear riders on Melbourne's cobbled bluestone laneways in its first year, to several thousand now on all sorts of bikes. Brisbane's Pushies Galore is another event that has taken the humble show and shine and created a three-day annual festival."

Cyclocross is a surprising favourite
"Six years ago cyclocross was a long forgotten phenomena in Australia, one of those obscure European sports that just didn't figure on the average Australian cyclist's radar. But after a



group of passionate Melbourne fans founded Dirty Deeds Cyclocross, an urban series, there has been a surge of interest in cyclocross as a sport down under. We now have competition series at state and national levels and cyclocross is growing Australia wide."

Cyclists are battling for public space
"Cities in Australia are starting to spend millions on infrastructure for cycling but it's still not enough, and what has been built is beset with problems relating to public space. However, ten years ago infrastructure for cyclists in our cities rarely made it to the table for discussion. And now it's definitely part of the conversation."

Women cyclists are on the rise
"Nationally women are still in the minority amongst cyclists in Australia, but in areas that have been investing in infrastructure (like the cities of Moreland and Yarra in Melbourne's inner-north) women are approaching fifty per cent of all commuters. The message is: make it safe and women ride. On the recreational and sporting front, Cycling Victoria are supporting equal prize money for female cyclists and groups like Dirty Deeds CX and Hells 500 work hard to make their events inclusive and welcoming."

There's a renaissance in the handmade
"There are long-established frame builders in Australia. Baum, Lewellyn and Victoria just to name a few, but in recent years there's been a renaissance in all things handmade and the bicycle world is no different. New frame builders like Kumo and Rogers Bespoke are leading the way along with custom leather work from Busyman Bicycles, Patebury and panniers and bags from the Industrial Sewing Workshop or bespoke cycling fashion like Night Brigade, Hey Reflecto and Bago Studio."

Street Sounds

Anna Enola, Berlin

Text: Anna Enola
Photography: Lia Darjes

Anna Enola is a tattooist and road racer based in Berlin. Last year she joined the cycle team of Spanish brand Dosnoventa and now she's a familiar face on the crit circuit. These are her favourite tracks to listen to on a roller session at home.

"I grew up in a small village in the Netherlands and got my first bicycle when I was three. I spent my younger days in the neighborhood on my bike, exploring every corner, and started riding a road bike when I was ten.

"Two years ago I got a fixed-gear bike and it was the beginning of a great journey. I got in with a group of people who did it in a harder way, more as a sport, and in 2014 I was lucky to make the team for Spanish brand Dosnoventa. I did my first race (Criterium) in the same year.

"It's not just about racing or winning or being part of 'the game'. When life gets too much, I take my bike and I go riding. I'm happy when I'm out there, I feel free. I feel the energy and strength, as well as the weather and nature, and it makes me smile every time.

"I don't think there are too many similarities between tattooing and cycling, but they both help people feel alive. They're a way to feel your body and they just make you feel good."

Frank Ocean - 'Lost'
Action Bronson - 'Terry'
Mount Kimbie - 'Ode To Bear'
Wu Lyf - 'L Y F'
Other Lives - 'Woodwind'



Singapore's Cyclist Sanctuary

Wheeler's Yard, Singapore

With his cafe-bike shop Wheeler's Yard, Tommy Ong is providing a place for like-minded commuters to come together.

Text: En-lai Yeoh
Photography: Ore Huiying

Its neighbours include an old folk's home, a temple and a new condo. Smack in the middle of a neighbourhood more famously known for a 1950s glamour movie lot graced by the likes of John Wayne and Ava Gardner, lies Wheeler's Yard, a two-year old bike "atelier" and cafe housed in an industrial warehouse.

The floor-to-ceiling blue doors of Wheeler's – among Singapore's most popular doors on social media – never open. Instead, patrons walk in via a side entrance into an open concept bike shop. Rows of Wheeler's own bikes lie in the center, next to two vintage barber chairs – a top draw for selfies and family photos.

But the bike shop is really only part of what's on offer at Wheeler's. The cafe attracts Singapore's growing number of hipsters who come not for the bicycles or accessories, but for the coffee, truffle fries and duck confit. The hipster cafe concept is growing in Singapore, as is cycling.

"Cycling is becoming a lifestyle," says Wheeler's Yard director Tommy Ong, now sixty-two. "I was confident this [bike shop/cafe] concept would take off." In fact, Tommy

was so confident he left the family car trading company he joined in 1978 to embark on his two-wheeled journey.

It paid off. Wheeler's Yard turned an operating profit almost immediately after opening in October 2012. Wheeler's own bikes – with parts sourced from Italy and Taiwan – are already being exported. Like its cafe concept, Wheeler's bikes are old school, costing between SGD600 and SGD3,000 (\$450-\$2,200), and they're modelled on bikes from a bygone era.

"Having only bikes is hard to sustain," says Tommy, the eldest of six boys and three girls. "The cafe culture took off in Singapore four to five years ago... The concept had to be right." So he merged Singapore's love for food and its growing love for cycling in Wheeler's Yard.

Cycling is booming in tiny Singapore, and not just as a form of leisure or exercise. The government is pushing the biking agenda, and has said it would increase its current "Park Connector" network to 360 km from the current 200 km by 2020. The aim is to get to 700 km of intertwined, car-free (with some cross points) bike-only



lanes, reports have said. Not bad for a country with a land mass of 716 square km – a quarter the size of Bali, Indonesia.

Bike shops have sprouted everywhere, but there is none like Wheeler's Yard. The back entrance to Wheeler's itself is located right in front of a "Park Connector" path – a route that Tommy takes every weekend to the Marina waterfront area with his family.

The Singapore government, in its 2013 transport master plan, predicts that cycling will pick up as infrastructure does. The Japanese army used bicycles to navigate through Malaya before they came to Singapore during World War II, and that's when bicycles are believed to have taken off in the state. Today, bikes are everywhere, but they still battle for road space and several ugly cyclist-driver scenes have also gone viral. For all its growth, cycling only constitutes around 1% of all trips in Singapore, a far cry from Copenhagen's 35% or Amsterdam's 37%.

But there's no doubt in Tommy's mind: "We're becoming more like Europe."

A Muse in Motion

Brooklyn, NYC

With her colorful bike paintings, Brooklyn-based artist Taliah Lempert has turned a visual obsession into a life-long aesthetic.

Text & Artwork: Taliah Lempert

I grew up in Ithaca, upstate New York, and my dad was really into cycling. We did it a lot as a family but when I left home to go to school in Boston I didn't cycle for almost ten years. Then, one day in New York, where I was studying at the New York Academy of Art, I passed a bike shop and there was this bike that just caught my eye. For some reason it was super appealing to me and, as it cost just eighty bucks, I bought it, asked the guy for directions to the Brooklyn Bridge, and began riding everywhere in New York.

It changed the way I was in the city. Before the bike I always took the subway and I knew the city around

certain subway spots. But suddenly with the bike I was going over the bridges, and going through the different neighborhoods, and seeing the whole city and getting a feel for how it was laid out. And then whenever I would come back to my bicycle it would just be so fabulous and beautiful and so I started painting it.

There are a bunch of reasons why bikes are awesome to paint. Bikes are made to carry figures and so I think there's a certain structure and geometry to them that is really figurative. The way the shape of a bike abstractly breaks up space and makes a composition and gesture is beautiful. A bicycle is a very positive thing; you're going somewhere, you're moving forward, you're harnessing your own power. And it makes a person, it makes me, more powerful and faster and able to do so much more. And that's a very powerful and positive symbol.

I spend a lot of time out and about in New York looking at locked-up bikes – the way the bars are, how they're taped, the paint job. Sometimes the classically beautiful bikes catch my eye – new racers, the way they're designed – but sometimes it's the beaters, in bright colors and beautifully worn, that are wonderful. There have been a couple of times that I've made new friends by stopping people on the street to ask if I could borrow their bike to paint.

Working with a limited palette allows you to be more creative. If some things are a given, like my interest in bikes, then you wake up every day with a certain amount of focus. Most artists have certain things that they work with. I love bikes but I also love all the people I meet through them. The community is pretty great.

I'm lucky living in a city where you can cycle everywhere. The other week I took a different bridge and it was a whole new experience. It was one of these beautiful days, the sun was shining, the views were spectacular, and all the noises of the traffic and construction was coming together to be music. And I would never have seen that if I hadn't have been riding my bike. Without it, I feel stranded.



Picture Peleton

The best of Instagram

Amateur and professional cycling photographers and enthusiasts are embracing Instagram to showcase their lives on two wheels. Follow the best, and you can live vicariously through their pedalling escapades. This is a selection of some of our favorite social media snappers and the pics they take on their diverse commutes.



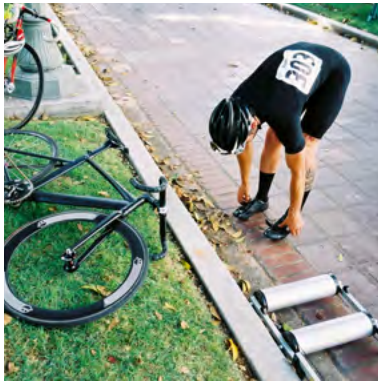
@paulcalver



@lizseabrook



@julietelliot



@andyfuckingellis



@lastopp



@lastopp

Building Bikes can Transform Lives

Bristol Bike Project, Bristol

A non-profit mechanic workshop in a corner of bohemia is showing how bikes can be a force for good.

Text: Samantha Maine
Photography: Chris Hoare

Back in 2008, friends and Bristol Refugee Rights volunteers James Lucas and Colin Fan noticed a need for disadvantaged and marginalized people to be independently mobile within the city. Usually forced to live miles away from important appointments, the city's ever-increasing bus prices meant many of these refugees had to walk for hours every day with heavy bags to better improve their chances of finding work and a stable home; Lucas and Fan saw cycling as the saviour.

Putting up posters around the city, the pair called for donated bikes and much to their surprise, they quickly outgrew their simple workshop due to the overwhelming response. Now based in Hamilton House in the Stokes Croft area, the workshop has dramatically changed from its humble beginnings. "It's gone from being a bunch of bikes in James' front room into a really big workshop with a shop, so that we're self-sustainable and somewhat self-funded," explains co-director Pi Manson, who has been working at the Bristol Bike Project since 2011, when he moved from Glasgow and started volunteering. "In that time, we've given out hundreds and hundreds of bikes to people in the local area who couldn't otherwise afford to get around at all," he continues.

With workshops ranging from the 'Earn-a-Bike Scheme' which sees the team give a three-hour, one-to-one service, teaching individuals basic mechanic skills, to their 'Women's Nights' which attempt to break the male-dominated demographics that are so often associated with

bicycle mechanics. And also the 'Young People's Bike Programme', 'Open Repair Days' and workshop sessions for supported volunteers. "We're a members co-operative, so anyone can become a member who either volunteers or is in any other way affiliated with the bike project," enthuses Manson. "We have a sort of horizontal structure – there are no leaders and everyone can make decisions about how we use the space and what sort of activities we do and what we spend our money on."

Open six days a week, the workshop's employees and volunteers are quick to welcome in any one in need of transport. "I met a guy who used to be a car mechanic in Damascus before coming over to the UK," Manson remembers. "It's a wonderful process to give your time to work one-to-one with somebody who then goes away on a bike and they can then know how to fix it and can come in any time. The kettle's always on, y'know, for people to pop in and have a chat."

As successful as the Bristol Bike Project has become, it's another reminder of the transformative benefits of cycling within the city. "I've seen firsthand how somebody who doesn't have any transport – who can't get around – how getting a bike has changed their life for the better. I know that that makes a real difference to their quality of life," Manson continues. "On a personal level, I've been able to tap into the community that's built around cycling in the city, meet friends and bag myself a job. I've been able to build a life in this city because of bicycles."



Co-Director, Henry Godfrey



My New York

Daniel Shea, NYC

Text: Daniel Shea
Photography: Bryan Derballa

Artist Daniel Shea has an eye for form. He explores the energy in lines – through his geometric photographs, paintings and sculptures – and, through projects like book *Blisney, II* (about a fictional town in Illinois), finds beauty in the way cities flow. Two years ago he moved to New York City from his hometown Chicago, and has explored every block on his trusty bike. Here, he describes his favorite spots.

"I've been riding bikes as long as I can remember. I grew up bmx-ing, then got heavy into city biking, fixed-gear bikes, alleycats, and all the punk shit in college. I calmed down in my mid-twenties and became a more civilized rider, but I still love it.

"It makes me feel like a kid. I love the chemical effects of the exercise – that high, specifically while riding through New York City, makes me really feel happy to be alive. It's also just often the quickest way to get around.

"My favourite spot to cycle through is Queensboro Bridge right by my house. The views are amazing, often you are racing

cars – feeling like a kid again – and you enter the city in midtown density. I love coming into Manhattan, ten storeys up. There's also a quick ride over to Roosevelt Island from my studio in Long Island City that I do frequently. It's a good spot to take it easy and think about the bigger picture of things.

"There's no direct connection between my cycling and art, but it's generally related to a lot of ideas and approaches that come out of DIY punk and hardcore culture, which had a big impact on my early development as a creative person. It's an immediate, visceral form of engaging with the world around you, it's good for your mind and body and has a very small footprint. My work has largely dealt with the architecture of cities, and looking for new ways to understand what they say about history and our relationship to power, and on a very simple level, biking represents this hacking of urban life, a space outside of prescribed ways of moving through the city. It's an approach that's related to how I decide what to look for when making work."



Factory Five

Tyler Bowa of Factory Five kickstarted the fixie obsession in Shanghai and now it's taking root.



Tyler Bowa and Jeff Liu of Factory Five.

Text: Charlotte Middlehurst
Photography: David Hogsholt

Tyler Bowa is a disruptive force in Shanghai's bike community. He first arrived in 2009 for a year-long placement with an architecture firm and, having rode fixed-gear back in Canada, he quickly set about scouting the local fixie scene. Only none existed. At that time, in a city of 23 million people (now over 24 million) there was not a single fixed-gear bike shop.

His first blog peoplesbike.com, therefore, had one simple aim: to find people to ride with. Within a year Tyler was leading Shanghai's first-ever Shanghai Alleycat race, involving over 150 people descending upon the entire city. By 2012, the number had grown to 1,000, at which point the government decided to shut it down. Other Shanghai 'firsts' included bike polo and weekly night rides, which at their peak drew around 300 people, before they too got suspended. But Tyler was not about to be deterred.

"They called us on the phone and asked if we wanted to come down and talk," he says. "In the last few years the Shanghainese government have appointed fluent English speakers. People who have studied abroad and get the [foreigner] mentality. They are not out to kill you or be bad guys, they're out to find a middle ground. At the end of the day, we want to do community-based events, so if we need to stop for a year so be it. Instead of saying, 'Hey, fuck you we're going to do it anyway,' and landing ourselves in jail for a year."

Still passionate to support the growing fixie community, Tyler decided, with four others (Drew Bates, Jeff Liu, Mattias Erlandsson and Karl Ke) to launch Factory Five – a brand that sells custom-made track bikes and reconditioned Chinese classics. Their shop, which is now run by just Tyler, Jeff and Drew, has since become an unofficial clubhouse for fixie enthusiasts. There's even an inbuilt bar serving draft IPA and a gallery space showing photography from trips like the recent escapade to Xinjiang, a desolate outcrop in the West of China. "True to our slogan, 'We Build, We Ride,' we built everything ourselves," says Tyler, contemplatively. "It all just started with very simple frame designs."

Taking inspiration from old Chinese bikes like The Yongjiu Forevers, still used by Chinese postmen, Tyler and co are harking back to a culturally significant time in the country's history. When US President Richard Nixon came to China in 1972 and Mao gave him a Forever bicycle, for example, it was a symbol of progress. But as Western influences, namely capitalism, crept in and China's middle classes grew along with its hunger for automobiles, these street bikes, which were primarily a mode of transport, became obsolete.

"All of a sudden, bikes were for the poor people and no one wanted them," says Tyler. "You had all these beautiful frames and

beautiful bikes with cultural significance that nobody wanted. Before Japan and the US became the global innovators, China was the country of pure innovation. But over the last fifty years they have focused on reproduction and manufacture."

The discarded Forevers are a symbol of this mass production from days gone by, a closing chapter in the country's economic history. By rescuing them, and restoring them as objects of beauty, Factory Five are subverting the 'Made in China' label, which carries so much stigma. "In the next five years to a decade you will see an enormous switch where China will become the center of innovation," predicts Tyler. This fits the Chinese Community Party message: that China must reorientate its economy away from low-quality mass production to quality consumption.

Business aside, community engagement remains the backbone of what the boys at Factory Five do. For the first two years they were speaking almost exclusively to foreigners but nowadays, the shop sees a split more like 70/30, local to foreigner. It's testament to the work they have done establishing themselves at the centre of their community. And now the obsession is spreading with other shops and brands and, most importantly, passionate riders, who are popping up all over the changing city.

Amelie Bonnet Villalonga

The Parisian architect describes the city she sees on her daily commute.



Text: Shelley Jones
Photography: Julien Pebrel

Commuting in Paris has something of a reputation. With its narrow, winding streets, cobbles, hills, lawless roundabouts and notorious gridlocks, a journey through the city can often feel like a scene out of Jacques Tati's Parisian commuter parody *Traffic*.

But the city's progressive stance towards cycling is changing inter-city travel from the streets up. Not only did Paris pioneer bikesharing in Europe with their Vélib' program – which is now the sixth-largest in the world – but a strong commitment to bike lanes, which web the mandala-shaped urban sprawl, means that both amateurs and seasoned pros are protected from the auto madness.

Amelie Bonnet Villalonga – an architect and avid cyclist based in the city – is a passionate advocate of Parisian bike culture. She started cycling with her dad and brother when she was very young and soon after discovered cross-country riding, which encouraged her to become a life-long aficionado of all things bike-related. Now, every day, she travels almost twenty kilometres on her Cinelli Mash Histogram and she never tires of the idyllic routes.

So what does her daily commute look like? "I cross Paris from East to West every day and get to practise the rue de Rivoli, which is a great challenge as well as a nightmare," she laughs. "Place de la Concorde is pretty mad too, but after rue de

Rivoli, it feels easy to cross. Then I go along the river to finish with a great hill from Alma to Trocadéro, where I keep burning my legs to avoid stopping at the red light."

The features of the city that may seem like obstacles to outsiders – narrow lanes, sharp corners, steep hills – are actually Amelie's favourite bits. "The city is small so everything seems ten minutes away," she says. "You can really challenge yourself with some great hills such as Ménilmontant and Montmartre and you can cycle in a circle for hours at Vincennes or Longchamps."

When she's feeling more adventurous, Amelie switches up her steed to the SOLOIST Cervelo and heads out of the spaghetti streets and into the surrounding nature – national parks and forests encircle the city like moss on a stone. "Paris is a beautiful city, but what I also like about it is that you can leave it to be in the middle of green fields in a snap, well almost," she says. "Spending the weekdays crossing Paris and then spending the weekends in great freedom, out of the city, is a huge pleasure."

Like any subculture, Parisian commuters stick together. And there are great initiatives, like the Paris Women's Cycling Team – which organizes female-only rides in Paris and beyond – to encourage participation from the uninitiated. "Sylvie from the

'Mittens' bike crew set up the Paris Women's Cycling Team to spread her love of cycling to other girls," says Amelie, who enjoys the opportunity to pedal en masse. "It's very enjoyable to ride with other women and every time I go I meet new amazing girls!"

So does that communal spirit extend to the busy rush-hour streets? "Yes, I love the way we say hi everyday while commuting," says Amelie, whose blue-sky Instagram account @amelie_bonnet_villalonga documents her busy commute in the metropolis and her picturesque adventures out in the wild. "Bike shops are awesome and very friendly, I visit la Bicyclette to say hi and also The Bicycle Store, not only if I have something to buy, but just to see friends and look at bikes and talk about the next great ride to organize. There's also a new coffee place, opened by friends who run the magazine *STEEL*, that is good to go to, especially as it's on my way back home."

And even if the traffic is thick and the streets full of the noise of the whirlwind Parisian day, Amelie still finds refuge in her daily commute. "Cycling across the city allows me to put away the everyday stress," she says, also revealing that she plans to have her own architecture studio at some point in the future. "By challenging myself in different ways I feel like I'm able to achieve more in life."

My Little Copenhagen

Text: Mette Willert
Illustration: Jim Datz

Copenhagen has a rep for being the most cycling friendly city in the world. But for bike-mad Mette Willert, it's simply home. With her hugely popular Instagram @littlemcph, Mette shares the secrets of her commuting adventures, and here she shows us her favourite route of the city.

Coffee Collective

For my drip coffee, I go to Coffee Collective which is on one of my favourite streets in the city. The staff are very passionate and they make the most lovely brew.

Jægersborggade 10, 2100 København
@coffeecollectif

Cyklistbutikken 1905

For a bike gadget chat, I drop by the Danish Cyclist Federation bike shop. The shop stocks a great collection of gadgets, clothing and bikes right in city centre. And they also stock my Japanese mini velo!

Rømersgade 5, 1362 København K
@cyklistforbundet

Nakedcph

Get your shoes at this sneaker heaven, girls only.

Klosterstræde 10, 1157 København
@nakedcph

Bo-Bi Bar

In the afternoon I will go for a cheap beer and a quiet talk in Bo-Bi Bar, as no phone conversations are allowed there. The crowd is a blend of locals, writers, journalists and artists.

Klareboderne 14, 1115 København K

Beau Marche

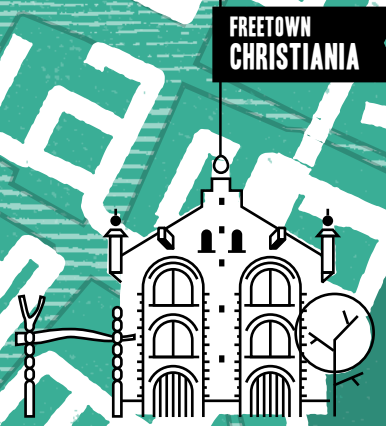
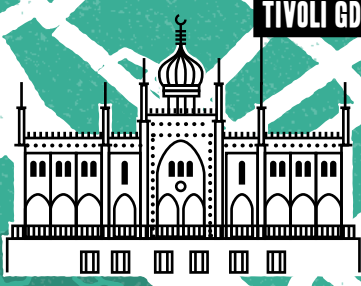
Hidden in a backyard you'll find this lovely French restaurant and antiques shop. The restaurant serves delicious food for dinner. It's pretty much one big table in a small cozy space, which makes for a friendly and relaxed atmosphere. Beau Marche has quickly developed into a hang-out for hip locals and members of the fashion crowd.

Ny Østergade 32 - 1101 København K
@beaumarcheph

Nikolaj Kunsthall

For photo inspiration I will get off the main shopping street and go visit the city's amazing art center which is located in a former church from the 13th Century. The center's main focus is on international art, photography and video installations. Oh, and by the way, Wednesdays are free!

Nikolaj Plads 10, København K
@nikolajkunsthall



THE HILLS OF VANCOUVER
ARE NOTHING FOR A SURREAL
ARTIST WITH A TOURING
BIKE BY HIS SIDE.

Andrew Pommier

Text: Andrew Pommier
Photography: Jennilee Marigomen

Andrew Pommier is an inspired illustrator and painter based in Vancouver. He spent his younger years eating, sleeping and dreaming about skateboarding, but after finding a like-minded creative community in Canada he embraced a career as an artist, producing animations for the likes of MTV and Fuel TV. Pommier has taken his creepy characters to solo exhibitions around the world from LA and New York to Tokyo and Paris and these days a lot of his inspiration comes from rolling around the rainy streets of the Pacific Northwest on his trusty bike. Riding a bike, he says, has changed his experience of the city.

My first memories of learning to ride a bike were probably around four or five years old. I had been totally stoked on my Big Wheels tricycle but when I got an orange metal kids' toy bike – with plastic spokes and training wheels on the back – I didn't look back. Once I had found my balance I moved onto a yellow bike with proper wheels and was off to the races. That was the start of my life as a cyclist.

Ten years ago I moved to Vancouver from Toronto, and all I had was an old modified mountain bike. I rarely used a bike in Toronto, as I preferred to roll on my skateboard, but I quickly realised that Vancouver isn't great for getting around on a board (very hilly with rough rain-battered pavements), so I asked a friend to build me a bike that could get me comfortably up and down the hills.

After a few years of riding these kinds of bikes, built of used parts – and a brief love affair with riding brakeless fixed-gear bikes (which is a little nutty, but really fun, if you consider the terrain of Vancouver) – I treated myself to a new, fresh-off-the-floor light touring bike. My new bike is great and super fun and has changed my experience of cycling in the city, allowing me to ride anywhere regardless of the steepness of the hills.

I now ride all year-round, despite the infamous rain, which I've never really minded. For me, the rain is way better than the snow and freezing winters out East. I've never ridden in the snow but I would tackle the bitter cold in Toronto if the roads were dry, which wasn't that uncommon.

Riding in Vancouver is a different story. It makes you realise how easy it is to bike in other cities. Every day I have to ascend a big hill that lies between my studio and home. Compared to that, biking around Portland or Berlin is easy rolling. Whenever I go away from Vancouver for too long it takes me a week or so to get back into hill-climbing form.

I pretty much haven't been without a bike since that first Big Wheels trike. My family was really active when we were young so biking was our primary mode of transport. In the summer my mom insisted that my brother and I both ride our bikes to any sporting activities (soccer, swimming lessons, track meets) and that gave me a good foundation to be a daily rider as an adult.

I will always try to avoid driving and public transport when I can. I relish the freedom a bike gives me.





Irene Stickney



Kirsten White and Cat Essiembre

Text: Kaitlyn Kochany
Photography: Annie Sakkab

Their bikes are colorful, zippy city machines. Each one is different: green rims, gold drop bars, and yellow cable housing ride alongside red handlebar tape and purple frames. The effect should be jumbled, but it's amazing what a sense of solidarity can do.

The Deadly Nightshades, Toronto's premiere all-girl cycling gang, have a bit of a reputation. They've been featured by the BBC, in Canada's national newspaper *The Globe and Mail*, and in dozens of local blogs, newspapers, photoshoots and magazines. They've become famous for their fierce style, their commitment to sustainability, and the way they intersect their own creative passions with life on two wheels. And riding as a crew doesn't hurt either. "People call out to us, when they see us riding," says Irene Stickney, one of the group's founding members. "They're like, 'Yeah, bike gang!'"

The members – Cat "Big Red" Essiembre, Irene "Fierce Bambi" Stickney, Kirsten "Snow White" White, and Niamh "Namtron" McManus – have been riding together under the Deadly Nightshades banner since 2007. The idea was born from their time as fashion students at Ryerson University, and from their shared love of cycling. "We all wanted to have a sense of creative community and friendship," Irene says. "Cat and Niamh were traveling, and we wanted to do something really fun for them when they got home." After spending a year abroad, Cat and Niamh returned and the Deadly Nightshades were officially launched. "We picked a name, and we printed the backs of denim jackets," laughs Irene. "And when they got back, we told them they were in a bike gang."

Their signature color, sea-foam green – which shows up on matching jackets, fingernails, and on the walls of Irene's fashion incubator studio – playfully toys with the society's idea of femininity. "It was, for us, a nod to 1950s kitchens," says Irene. "It was a bit of a re-appropriation of a stereotypical housewife color. We wanted to take it and turn it into something that was a little bit tough."

References for their two-wheeled crew are a carefully curated trip

through time, referencing male post-WWI motorcycle clubs, 1950s London Mods, and all-women California biker gangs ("Tough girls with long hair," says Irene). "It was an alternative way of being feminine, without being stereotypical," she explains. "Our style is Hells Angels meets the Pink Ladies." And, she adds, they're obviously all into *The Punk Singer* – a 2013 documentary that explores the trials and tribulations of Riot Grrrl pioneer Kathleen Hanna.

"We're all creatives, designers, photographers, and makers. We're all really visual. We love to head out [as a gang], because it gives us such an amazing feeling of being part of team, supported and encouraged by the rest of the ladies," says Niamh. "By helping each other, collaborating on projects, and supporting each other, we can succeed at anything we put our minds to. It's a really empowering feeling. [...] The 'bike gang' component started as a verb. 'Do you guys want to bike gang tonight?' It meant let's get together, on bikes, and see where the night takes us."

Being a Deadly Nightshade has been a two-wheeled adventure. In 2008, the gang was the subject of a documentary called *A Night Out with the Deadly Nightshades*, which screened as part of the Bicycle Film Festival. They've walked the runway during FAT, Toronto's annual fashion and culture festival. And, despite the fact that they all have full-time jobs in design and fashion, they work on Deadly Nightshades projects whenever they have free time. "We structure ourselves like a collective, so everyone has an equal voice," says Niamh. "Each member can suggest projects and whoever has time and interest will join in."

Take, for example, their 2011 short film *Fabric Bike*. It's ►

AMERICAN SUFFRAGETTE SUSAN B ANTHONY ONCE SAID THE BIKE HAS DONE MORE TO EMANCIPATE WOMEN THAN ANYTHING ELSE IN THE WORLD. CANADIAN ALL-GIRL GANG THE DEADLY NIGHTSHADES ARE CARRYING ON ITS REBELLIOUS SPIRIT.

The Deadly Nightshades

“OUR HOPE WOULD BE THAT WE CAN ENCOURAGE OTHER LADIES TO GET INVOLVED WITH BIKES, ON THEIR OWN TERMS.”

a seven-minute film set to punky music – a fast-forward montage of the Nightshades creating a bike out of, yes, fabric. The spokes are made of yarn. The forks have actual cutlery in them. The cogs are flashy gold lamé. The whole thing is a love letter to the DIY culture that Irene says the group holds dear; it’s also a kiss blown to the bike as an object of their affections.

And they do love their bikes. “I would sleep with my bike if there was room in my bed for three of us,” Cat laughs. Although it’s not always a simple love. “It takes effort to be a cyclist,” she says. “But it’s not a crazy left-wing concept, even though that is sometimes the stereotype you are given.”

Kirsten is a little more reflective. “Being a poor working student left me with little option when I moved out of the house at nineteen,” she says. “To get around other than cycling was just not in my budget. It offered me options to go anywhere in the city for free.” Irene is more direct. “Riding a bike makes me really happy,” she says.

“I’ve structured my life to give me opportunities to ride my bike, because it’s a choice that makes me feel good.”

These days, the Deadly Nightshades are a little more spread out, and their careers take up more time. But the gang is still a big part of their lives. “Toronto is definitely the epicentre of what we are up to, and because it’s our hometown, we will always be back here. We are lucky to live in a point in time where connecting over distance is easier than it’s ever been,” Niamh says. The group recently travelled together to Costa Rica, and whenever members are far-flung they keep in touch via Instagram, Facebook and Twitter.

“Our hope would be that we can encourage other ladies to get involved with bikes, on their own terms,” says Niamh. “There are a few other all-girl biker gangs out there, which is amazing, and there is room for so many more.”



JOHANNESBURG’S PIONEERING CYCLISTS ARE BREAKING SOCIAL BARRIERS, ONE RIDE AT A TIME.

Critical Mass Jozi

Text: Ufrieda Ho
Photography: Kevin Sutherland



Melvin Neale



When people say Johannesburg is not for sissies it’s a warning about the rough edges of a city where stories of crime and reckless driving dominate press. It’s an invocation too – a call to bravery, to get on the saddle and ride the streets regardless.

The message has been getting through steadily over the last six or seven years. And it’s sparked a two-wheeled revolution, fuelled by sports cyclists and weekend warriors who are emerging from peri-urban parks and nature reserves to insert themselves more directly in the bustle of city life.

The knock-on effect of the rise and rise of commuter cycling has not only forced a re-negotiation of urban planning, it’s shaken up ideas of so-called “no-go” zones.

James Happe is founder of Critical Mass Jo’burg, a night-time group ride that swarms through the city on the last Friday of every month. Back in 2007 he gathered together a few friends – and friends of friends – and organized an impromptu night ride with a group of about twenty cyclists. In a city where areas are off-limits after dark, threats of bike-jacking are real and cycle lanes non-existent, the sight of a small crew cycling around joyfully was totally new. Happe, though, believed in Jo’burg; even its “rougher” neighborhoods were ready, he says, for wheel-powered change.

The idea stuck and now years later over

1,000 cyclists join in the monthly charge-around. It’s given rise to numerous offshoots including the annual Freedom Ride, full-moon rides and women-only rides. Jo’burg is a place full of collisions and contradictions, but it’s got a big heart, big spirit and energy that’s infectious: the cyclists know this exquisite magnetism.

Critical Mass originated in San Francisco in the 1960s, when a group of cyclists-turned-activists started challenging social boundaries as a way to stake their claim on the city’s streets. It’s since become a global movement, encouraging vehicular traffic to share public space with cyclists and pedestrians in major cities around the world.

“Critical Mass has given people the opportunity to explore parts of the city as citizens not as tourists going on safari,” says Happe.

The emphasis of Critical Mass is not on beating the clock or clocking up kilometres – most rides are about twenty kilometres in distance, are free and laidback. It’s not unusual to see a mix of hardcore riders peddling alongside newbies, people on unicycles and riders with baby and kiddies in tow.

“Critical Mass is about having fun, in a group, on wheels,” Critical Mass administrators state quite plainly. Be safe, be responsible, be cool.”

For Melvin Neale, who co-founded Critical Mass with Happe and is responsible for mapping out the monthly routes, night rides are a sampler and stepping stone to getting more people on bikes, more frequently. Riding different parts of the city as a group gives people enough confidence to become commuter cyclists.

“Most people are afraid they’ll be a crime target or that they’ll be hit by a car. But they find once they make the decision to just get on their bikes and start cycling to and from work, they’re fine. It’s about being aware, being assertive, making yourself visible and being respectful to each other,” says Neale.

Happe and Neale know that Critical Mass is not a panacea for a city with social ills. They understand that cycling comes with a price tag and, like many things in South Africa, barriers to entry may be dictated by class and wealth. But in a country dominated by cars, interacting more spontaneously with the city is one small way to bridge the divide. “When you’re a commuter cyclist you start talking to street vendors, newspaper sellers and people who recognize you; you have conversations,” says Neale.

Twenty kilometres across town in Soweto, on the western edge of Jo’burg, Lebo Mahape has also witnessed cycling crumble social barriers.



Sipho Tati

Mahape started a bicycle tour company in this former township in 2006. Townships under South Africa’s Apartheid regime enforced separation of race groups; now even after twenty-one years of democracy, segregation is a lingering hangover from those dark days. For Mahape the tours build bridges. And bicycles, he says, are the magic ingredient.

“When I started my business I couldn’t afford a minibus so I bought bicycles. People were open to trying something different so they came on the tours,” says Mahape. “When tourists are on bicycles locals see them as equals, not people stepping off buses with big cameras that they think are rich with lots of money to spend.”

Mahape promotes his business at Soweto festivals, giving away free bicycle tours to locals. It gets Soweto locals to see their own township as tourists and helps them better understand and accept outsiders in their backyard. “I love it when locals tell me they’ve learnt something new about their own township,” he says.

Instead of whizzing around on air-conditioned buses with set itineraries, the bicycle tours tend to be more interactive, more organic. The tours have been incident-free, despite constant challenges. “It can be difficult doing the tours in Soweto,” Mahape says of the area’s dire need for better infrastructure. “It’s not just that there are no cycling lanes here;

there aren’t even sidewalks or pavements.”

Over the past two years cycle lanes have made it onto the City of Jo’burg’s upgrade plans. The lanes still don’t cover the city in any significant way but they stand as kilometres of intent and a move in the right direction for a community desperate for alternatives to car-based transport. Cycling culture is yet to be entrenched in Jo’burg; motorists still park in cycle lanes or use them to squeeze past other cars. But citizens are pushing back.

Newly formed organizations like Juca (Johannesburg Urban Cyclists Association) lobby for better support for commuter cycling. Juca’s work has centered on mapping out and sharing routes online. They lobby city authorities to protect cycling corridors and promote integrated urban planning that includes an extension of cycle lanes, secure parking for bicycles and public transport that accommodates transportation of bicycles.

Jo’burg’s two-wheeled revolution is pushing forward whatever uphill climbs may lie ahead. It’s as if a million miles have passed from back in 2007 when a few guys dared venture out – it makes a bit of courage a thing of beauty.

As Neale says: “The best part of Critical Mass is that it’s got people realising that parts of the city they thought were scary, crime-ridden and inaccessible after dark are actually places full of life, and are spaces they can enjoy.”

“RIDING DIFFERENT PARTS OF THE CITY AS A GROUP GIVES PEOPLE ENOUGH CONFIDENCE TO BECOME COMMUTER CYCLISTS.”



James Happe

Bagjack

WITH HIS INNOVATIVE BIKE MESSENGER BAG COMPANY BAGJACK, PROTO-BERLIN COURIER PETER BRUNSBURG HELPED SHAPE AN ENTIRE CULTURE.

Peter Brunsberg grew up in East Berlin, during the Soviet Union, not far from what is now the headquarters of bagjack – his messenger bag empire. In East Germany back then, people didn’t have much choice over their profession, and Peter decided his best bet was to become an electrician.

But fate intervened in the form of 1980s hip hop culture, and soon after Peter joined the crews of skateboarders and dancers at main square Alexanderplatz, a talent scout from a local theatre saw how he moved and suggested he audition for the ballet. Peter was encouraged by the thought of skipping compulsory military service. “I thought, ‘That’s a nicer view of my life!’” he says. “So I went and auditioned at the ballet school and they took me.”

Then, one and a half years later, the Berlin Wall fell and everything changed. The ballet school lost its state funding, and Peter lost his spot. “I wasn’t that sad about it because the situation for dancers had completely changed,” he says. “They began to only offer one-year contracts, and it was very hard on the body.”

So when, a year later, the first bike messenger service was set up to fill gaps in the new city’s infrastructure, Peter decided to apply. He was now living in Friedrichshain, where punks and other alternative subcultures had taken over entire streets, with squatters occupying empty buildings. Berlin had become a kind of post-apocalyptic wonderland for underground culture with bars and clubs springing up in unlikely places and Peter and his friends were part of a new generation of liberated East Germans that were embracing every new experience. He remembers once climbing through a hole in the wall of an abandoned building and heading down to the basement where Brazilian students were serving Caipirinhas. “In the end it got so popular that they made it bigger and bigger, and took out more and more walls, and we were sitting there wondering how the building was still standing,” he laughs. “But at that age nobody thinks that their life is in danger.”

Unlike Berlin today, it wasn’t common for people to bike everywhere in the early 1990s, but for Peter and his messenger mates, their bikes were like a swiss army knife for life. Whether it was work, play, or even moving house – the bike was an essential tool. “Then in 1993 we organised the first Cycle Messenger World Championships, and for the first time in Berlin we saw these one-shoulder strap bags from the

New York guys,” remembers Peter. “At this time we were using the Ortlieb roll-top bags, but if you’re riding a racing bike, you’re sitting low and you can’t see behind you because of the corners of the bag. So we loved these one-shoulder strap bags.”

Berlin might have been in the throes of a creative renaissance but cycling couture was not so readily available. “In 1993 you couldn’t order a bag on the Internet. There was no Internet in 1993,” laughs Peter. Luckily East Germans were resourceful. So Peter and his friend started making their own. “The first bag was made by my friend out of an old nylon sports bag, an old postal bag and a rain jacket,” says Peter. “It was red, yellow and green – Jamaican style – and all our friends wanted one.”

They began to make bags for the hardcore messenger crew, but it didn’t occur to them to create a pattern, so each time they started again from scratch – which wasn’t really effective – and Peter’s friend decided to quit. But Peter persevered and by 1997 he had founded the bagjack label. While messenger bags were always their main focus, their reputation spread and Peter began to get requests to produce bags for specific uses. “We have a lot of experience with fashion and functionality and we’re also working with the Fraunhofer Institute that develops electronic parts, as well as textile institutes in the south of Germany who are developing high-level webbing and fabrics that will be uncuttable, combined with sensors so that you get a text message if someone attacks your bag,” explains Peter.

The medical company, Berlin Heart AG, commissioned a bag to house a heart-monitoring computer system for patients with artificial hearts. “That was really scary because there are tubes and cables coming directly out of the body and into the bag with the controller and the battery, and if the controller doesn’t work, the person will die,” explains Peter.

But despite the many trajectories of bagjack and the extent to which the project has grown, Peter still just gets a buzz every time he sees people cycling around the streets of Berlin with their bags. “Sometimes we have people who ask if we can remake their original bag. Of course we suggest new bags in our range, but if the customer really loves his original bag, we just make it again for him,” says Peter. “I love developing new things, and working on new forms and solutions. I also love simply being able to make things. If I have an idea, I can just go to the computer, design it, cut it out and start sewing.”



Text: Cinnamon Nippard
Photography: Andrea Gjestvang



Cuban Bike

In Central Havana, privacy is an abstract concept. Conversations between neighbors on third-floor balconies take place at full volume, gesticulating aggressively across the gaps between buildings. A few metres below, young shirtless men push produce carts with rusty wheels, advertising tomatoes and onions covered with a day’s worth of city grime. Traffic is held at a casual standstill while kids play soccer and baseball on the potholed tarmac. The smell of diesel, sea air, pork stew, and overflowing garbage bins compete for real estate in the humid atmosphere.

In a world where so much is visible, hiding in plain sight becomes easy. Ernesto Peña is one of the few bike mechanics who still work in Central Havana, practicing his trade from whatever small space he can eek out. For the past few years, he’s been working from his living room and the narrow walkway that leads to his front door – with no advertising and no sign out front. “People find me by word of mouth,” Ernesto explains. “I’ve been working on these things for twenty years so the clients know me.”

He simply can’t afford a bigger workspace, he says. “Every neighborhood used to have several mechanics’ workshops,” Ernesto explains. “Everyone who went through the Special Period knows at least something about bikes.” ‘The Special Period’ is the time after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, when petroleum and other subsidies dried up, bringing cars and public transport grinding to a stand-still across the island. To keep Cubans moving through years of extreme austerity, the government imported a million Chinese bikes and kicked off an unexpected cycling boom.

It was easy being a cyclist in Havana during the early 1990s: centralized planning meant bike lanes, spare parts

shops, guarded parking and neighborhood mechanics were ubiquitous. Soon lawyers, doctors, and even central government workers were fixing flats, straightening wheels and replacing spokes with their neighborhood mechanic. The state-owned bicycle workshops specialized in beastly, fifty-plus pound imported commuter bikes such as the Phoenix, Flying Pigeon, and the Forever. The Cubans even started manufacturing their own bikes at a retooled bus factory.

But barely a decade into the bicycle revolution, ships carrying Venezuelan petroleum sailed into Havana harbour, courtesy of late President Hugo Chávez. He offered interest-free loans to help the Cuban economy out of crisis and traded oil for Cuban doctors. Putting the bike at the center of transport policy eventually fell out of favour. “When the workshops were state-owned, we didn’t make enough money as workers,” Ernesto explains. “Then the parts ran out, so eventually they were closed.” Subsidies for cycling dried up and what was once a total necessity became a niche pursuit once again.

When tourists explore Old Havana, they rarely set foot in the four blocks of Calle Cristina between Fernandina and Matadero. The sun-baked ruins, and the people who call them home, are submerged in the sticky humidity of Caribbean poverty. Calle Cristina spurs little intrigue for exploration – unless you’re a cyclist. Here, cruising down the street on a half-decent bike provokes hoots and hollers from sidewalk vendors vying for your attention. They want to know if you are buying, selling, or trading. Calle Cristina is the epicentre of economic activity involving bicycles, and Habaneros will tell you that if your bike gets stolen you can come here to buy it back – one piece at a time. ▶

NOW THAT THE US
EMBARGO ON TRADE HAS
BEEN LIFTED, WILL THE
ONCE BIKE-CRAZY CUBANS
REVIVE THEIR LOVE OF
TWO WHEELS?

Revolution

Text: Graham Sowa
Photography: Lisette Poole



“CHOOSING TO CYCLE IN CUBA STILL
REQUIRES DESIRE AND DEDICATION,
YOU HAVE TO BE INNOVATIVE.”

“If you use a bicycle in Havana now it’s because you want to,” Amit Fernandez explains in front of his postage stamp-sized workshop, just a kilometre from where the Chinese bikes were first wheeled out onto the island. Amit’s shop is a sun-seared tin box, with frames and a rag-tag collection of bike parts in varying states of disrepair. Today’s sale item (price: 150 pesos, negotiable) is a lonely, folding travel bike.

The few mechanics who have stuck to their trade carry the responsibility of keeping Havana’s bikes on the road. “If you need a part for a bike and you can’t find it in Cristina then don’t bother looking anywhere else,” Amit affirms. But he isn’t so upbeat these days. “Ever since they changed the customs regulations for bringing in spare parts, I’ve had almost nothing to sell.” People used to come back from Miami, Madrid or Quito with their bags packed full of clothes, electronics, spare parts and other items scarce or absent in state-run shops. But in late 2014, customs regulations changed to limit Cubans to bringing back just one of any item when they returned to the island.

The once ubiquitous Chinese bicycles have disappeared rapidly from the streets of Havana, mostly bought up by Cubans from the provinces, where public transportation still leaves a lot to be desired. “Most people in the city don’t want to use a bike,” Amit explains. “Besides, we can’t always get spare parts when they break.” Before I leave, he makes one final offer and lowers the price of the folding bike to 125 pesos.



“After studying the area, we concluded this location was the best because we have access to the local Cuban market as well as the growing tourist industry.”

Taller Vélo captures attention not just because its orderliness stands out in Havana’s chaotic urban jungle, but because both its owner and chief mechanic are women. “People aren’t used to seeing women do this type of work,” Nayvis explains, laughing. “Some are surprised but everyone is supportive. I remind them that both sexes had to learn how to tinker with bikes during the Special Period.”

Nayvis has her eyes on the future and is closely watching the evolution of Cuban cycling culture. “Havana residents are still riding bikes, but not the old Chinese commuters,” she explains. “They’re riding new mountain bikes or road bikes so we’re specializing in servicing newer models.” Since 2011, the government has allowed citizens to open privately-owned small businesses such as Taller Vélo. Nayvis is taking full advantage: attracting new customers through advertising, giving out smart business cards (even ambushing cyclists as they ride past on the street to hand them over) and is building a web and social media presence.

Nayvis welcomes the improved relations between Cuba and the United States. The historic December 17, 2014, agreement paved way for growing cooperation and the loosening of restrictions for international banking, trade and travel. Nayvis anticipates growing tourist numbers and has invested accordingly: she has bikes for rent and offers tour packages through a travel agent to allow visitors to explore the island by pedal power.

Cuba stands to gain from the détente with the US through an end to the five-decade-long embargo and an expansion of its tourism market. Lifting the economic blockade would make the mechanics’ search for spare parts a whole lot easier and the arrival of American sightseers would boost demand for more shops like Taller Vélo. Cuba’s up-and-down love affair with the bicycle looks set to get a new lease of life, but the benefits could take a while to filter through. Bicycles were imposed on us as a solution to our transportation crisis, now those of us that continue riding do it out of choice,” Nayvis explains. “Choosing to cycle in Cuba still requires desire and dedication, you have to be innovative.”

A few kilometres away, in the more cosmopolitan Vedado neighborhood, Nayvis Diaz has a markedly more upbeat view of her bicycle enterprise. In September 2014, Nayvis opened Taller Vélo (Vélo Workshop) behind the famous Coppelia ice cream parlor. The heart of the hotel district, Vedado is home to green parks with plenty of shade and retains a sense of planned urban development, with its wide streets carrying names like ‘Victor Hugo’ and ‘John Lennon’.

Unlike Ernesto’s crowded shop, Taller Vélo is more spacious, with bike racks and a well-stocked workspace. “I happen to have the best mechanic in Havana,” Nayvis explains, referring to the workshop’s chief mechanic: Daylin Carbó.



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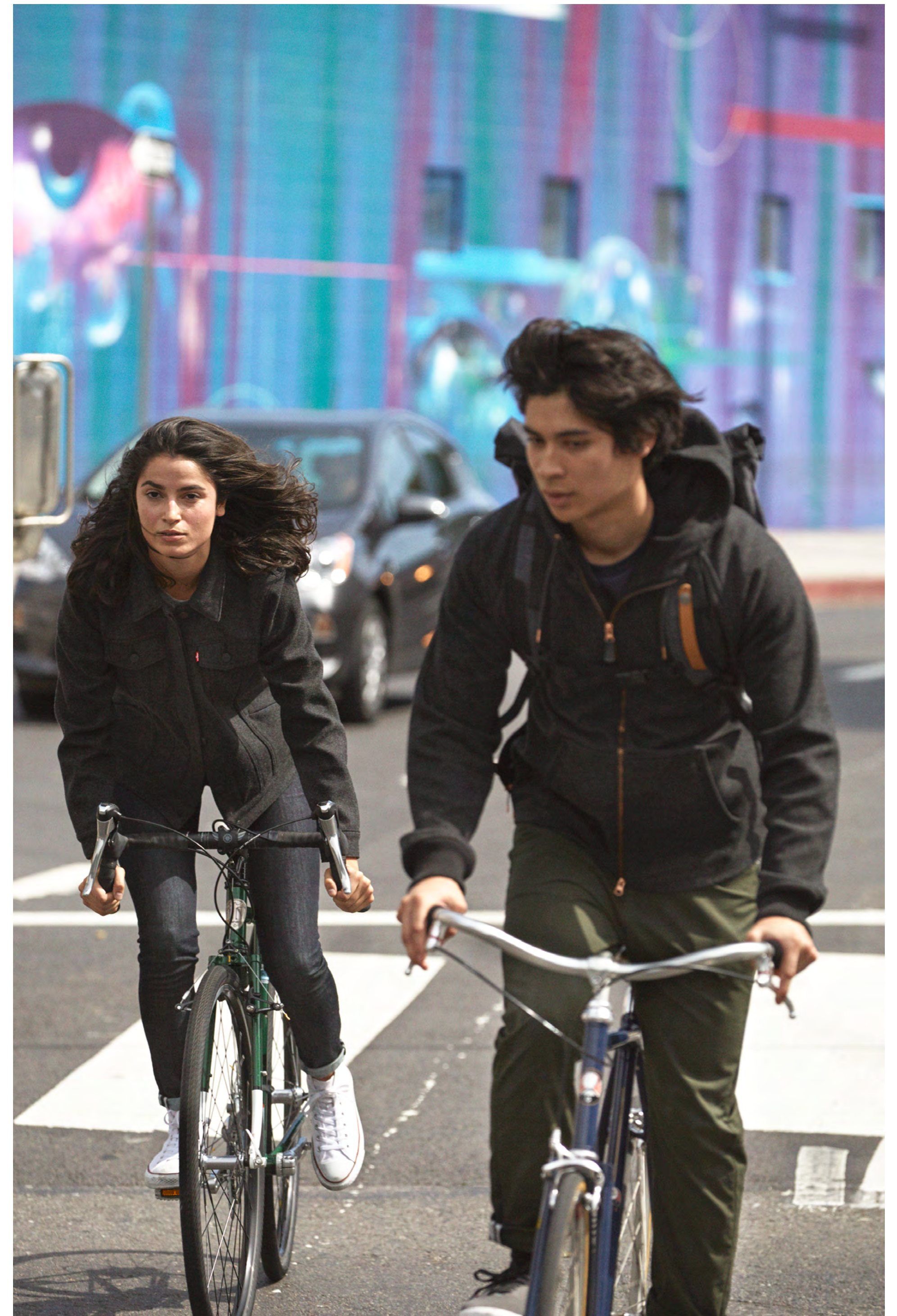
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Stretch for
increased mobility

Deeper front and
back pockets for
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Water + dirt
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3M™ reflective cuffs
for visibility





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